

NATASHA HUGHES MW

THE WINES OF BEAUJOLAIS



13 RÉGNIE

Year in which *cru* status was awarded: 1988

Total vineyard area: 380 hectares

Altitude: 250–500 metres

Average altitude: 350 metres

Notable *lieux-dits*: Montmerand, La Haute Rorze, Les Braves, Les Chastys, Thulon, Vallières, Oeillet

The twin steeples of the church in the village of Régnie-Durette are as inextricably linked to the built landscape of Beaujolais as is the windmill of Moulin-à-Vent or Fleurie's Chapel of the Madonna. The village is located in the wedge-shaped, gently sloping southern part of the *cru*. If you look northwards, though, you'll see steeper slopes, crowned with forests, in the background.

Régnie is the most recent appellation in Beaujolais to graduate from named village (one of the many villages in the Beaujolais Villages zone) to official *cru*. This doesn't happen with any great frequency – in fact, since the initial flurry of *cru* creation in the 1930s, Régnie is the only village, so far, to have broken through the glass ceiling (although wine-makers in Lantignié and Blacé have high hopes that it will not be the last, see p. 195). In order to mount a case for its promotion, Régnie would have had to argue, persuasively and forcefully, that its terroirs were already recognized as the source of wines of high quality. And yet, since its apotheosis, the *cru* has struggled to make good on its early promise, and much of its annual production is sold off in bulk and declassified to *village* status.

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RÉGNIE 167



The twin towers of Régnie-Durette's church are instantly recognizable (photo courtesy of Fabrice Ferrer/Beaujolais Wines)

However, there's much to admire about Régnie's terroir. Despite the fact that, on average, Régnie is not one of the most sloping *crus* in Beaujolais, there are a number of scarped granitic hillsides here, with a range of altitudes and exposures. Where granite doesn't dominate, you'll find soils derived from sandstones, schists and, particularly in the south, richer alluvial deposits and piedmont formations. All of this allows for a range of fruit expression and structure in the wines made here, although most Régniés are notable for their plush, juicy character rather than their firmness of structure.

There is one other thing that's worth mentioning in the context of Régnie and its capacity to make high-quality wines. The relative affordability of its vineyards seems to have attracted an increasing number of newcomers in recent years, many of whom have brought a new spirit of dynamic optimism to bear on their winemaking. It may not be all that long before Régnie becomes as famous for the quality of its wines as it is for its twin-steeped church.

Producers

Domaine les Capréoles

capreoles.com

After years spent working as an agronomist for Gérard Bertrand, a major producer based in the Languedoc, Cédric Lecareux could have

is paid to biodiversity, with the plans to plant hedges around the vineyards and trees within them already well under way. The health of the soil is also deemed to be important at Vernus, and some of its plots are ploughed by horse rather than by machine. Vinification is adapted to the requirements of both individual plots, vintage conditions and the desired outcome, with most bunches being fully or partially destemmed prior to fermentation in stainless steel vats and maturation in Burgundian oak barrels, the exception being the Beaujolais Villages, which is vinified using semi-carbonic maceration.

There are ten cuvées made at the Domaine de Vernus, of which five are designated 'Characterful' wines, either blends from one of four *cru*s (Chiroubles, Fleurie, Régnié and Morgon) or a Beaujolais Villages, while the 'Exceptional' wines are parcel selections, two from Régnié, and one each from Morgon, Fleurie and Moulin-à-Vent. The cuvées I tasted all showed some real density of structure and concentration of fruit. The Beaujolais Villages has formidable concentration for a wine that is, effectively, the domaine's entry-level bottling. The Régnié is pretty, delicate and fresh, made in a perfumed, floral style somewhat reminiscent of a Volnay. La Cadole, the 'Exceptional' Régnié cuvée, is incredibly deeply coloured, with equally deep concentration of dark, graphite-tinged fruit on the palate. It's well balanced – so much so that you have to be paying attention to notice the hefty amount of alcohol buried beneath all that ripe fruit. The Morgon Grands Cras shows really lively acidity and notes of red berries, stone fruit and baking spice, and the long finish is framed by firm, talcum powder-fine tannins.

Domaine Philippe Viet

domainephilippeviet.fr

Philippe Viet had always been a bit of a wine buff, but after 15 years of working in the banking industry and as an IT consultant, he decided to throw in the corporate towel and follow his passion.

A tasting of Eric Janin's wines (see p. 94) led to both a lifelong friendship and a growing interest in the wines of Beaujolais. Work experience in Janin's vineyards was followed by time in both the Loire and Australia, before Viet settled to his wine studies in Beaune, and finally put down roots on the outskirts of Morgon.

Most of his vineyards lie within the *cru* of Régnié, although Viet also makes a vibrant, refreshing Beaujolais Villages wine from grapes grown in Lantignié and an elegant Fleurie.

Viet, a thoughtful man, gives much consideration to viticulture. His first step on taking over the process of conversion was to say that 'If you don't want to be a people either'.

The process of conversion was not without its challenges, that although some plots were worked around by the use of chisels, working out how best to plan the grub up in the vineyard was a massal selection of the way, he says, the key to the otherwise there's a great deal of work also wants to plant at the end encourages the vines to produce fruit.

Viet's ultimate vision was to pick, balance and control the falling acidities and pH.

Once the grapes are harvested, carbonic fermentation is used once the wines reach the regime. Eventually, the process is a hodgepodge of vesicles, tanks and a 500-litre of his savoury, fermented amphorae squat in the vineyard.

Of the two Régnié wines, the one with fine, elegant tannins and thol. The Mosaique wines dominate the wine-fruited palate.

Viet, a thoughtful man who chooses his words carefully, has given much consideration to his approach to both viticulture and winemaking. His first step on taking control of his Régnié vineyards was to start the process of converting them to organic farming. He believes passionately in the duty that growers have to take care of the environment, saying that 'If you don't take care of the land, you're not taking care of people either'.

The process of conversion hasn't always been an easy one. Viet says that although some plots are easily convertible, others have been bashed around by the use of chemicals. With great regret, he's in the process of working out how best to replace a parcel of 100-year-old vines that he's planning to grub up in the near future. He's vacillating between planting a massal selection or opting for a mixed assortment of clones. Either way, he says, the key thing is the maintenance of diversity in a vineyard, otherwise there's a greater risk of the plants succumbing to maladies. He also wants to plant at high density, believing that inter-vine competition encourages the vines to work harder and produce more concentrated fruit.

Viet's ultimate winemaking goal is balance. Judging the right moment to pick, balancing off the competing claims of rising sugar levels, falling acidities and phenolic ripeness, is a challenge, but one he relishes.

Once the grapes are safely harvested, he prefers to start his semi-carbonic fermentations at around 20°C, with daily *remontages*, and then once the wines reach about 10% abv, he introduces punch-downs to the regime. Eventually, press and free-run juices are blended and matured in a hodgepodge of vessels that range from the conventional (stainless steel tanks and a 500-litre puncheon, which is used to mature a proportion of his savoury, ferrous Fleurie) to the unexpected (two large sandstone amphorae squat in a corner of the small winery).

Of the two Régnié cuvées, the Haute-Ronze is the lighter and fresher, with fine, elegant tannins and red fruit tinged with pepper and menthol. The Mosaïque is richer and riper in style, with fleshy tannins that dominate the wine in its youth, before it opens up to reveal an opulently fruited palate.

APPENDIX: MAKING THE MOST OF BEAUJOLAIS IN SIX BRIEF LISTS

10 blue-chip names to conjure with in Beaujolais

1. Jean-Marc Burgaud (p. 150)
2. Louis-Claude Desvignes (p. 156)
3. Jean Foillard (p. 158)
4. Château des Jacques (p. 93)
5. Jean-Claude Lapalu (p. 186)
6. Domaine Lapierre (p. 160)
7. Thibault Liger-Belair (p. 97)
8. Château du Moulin-à-Vent (p. 99)
9. Jean-Paul et Charly Thévenet (p. 164)
10. Château Thivin (p. 190)

Today's leading producers

1. Frédéric Berne (p. 196)
2. Alex Foillard (p. 158)
3. Domaine Mee Godard (p. 159)
4. Domaine de la Grand'Cour (p. 111)
5. Domaine de la Grosse Pierre/Domaine Pauline Passot (p. 136)
6. Domaine des Marrans (p. 121)
7. Domaine Richard Rottiers (p. 225)
8. Domaine Saint-Cyr (p. 225)
9. Antoine Sunier (p. 174)

10. Julien Sunier (p. 128)
11. Domaine Thillardon (p. 85)
12. Domaine Philippe Viet (p. 176)

A baker's dozen of rising stars

1. Yann Bertrand (p. 108)
2. Domaine Chapel (p. 132)
3. Domaine les Garçons (p. 200)
4. Famille Guerin (p. 92)
5. Yohan Lardy (p. 96)
6. Domaine Célia et David Large (p. 218)
7. Jules Métras (p. 123)
8. Domaine de Mont Joly (p. 208)
9. Domaine Benjamin Passot (p. 83)
10. Domaine les Roches Bleues (p. 189)
11. Domaine de Romarand (p. 211)
12. Clos Sauvage (p. 68)
13. Domaine Valma (p. 129)

Top 10 domaines where women make (at least some of) the wines

1. Domaine Chasselay/Famille Chasselay (p. 216)
2. Anne-Sophie Dubois (p. 109)
3. Domaine Mee Godard (p. 159)
4. Domaine de la Grand'Cour/Ophélie Dutraive (p. 111)
5. Domaine de la Grosse Pierre/Domaine Pauline Passot (p. 136)
6. Famille Guerin (p. 92)
7. Domaine Paul Janin et Fils (p. 94)
8. Clos de Mez (p. 124)
9. Domaine Obora (p. 82)
10. Domaine de Romarand (p. 211)

Top 10 white wine producers

1. Domaine Chasselay/Famille Chasselay (p. 216)
2. Domaine Ducroux/Christian et Thibault Ducroux (p. 171)
3. Domaine Dupré-Goujon (p. 184)
4. Domaine Paul Janin et Fils (p. 94)
5. Yohan Lardy (p. 96)
6. Domaine Célia et David Large (p. 218)